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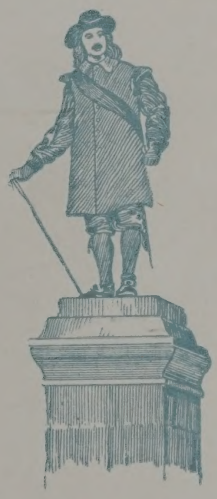
TWELVE SOUTH AFRICAN FLOWERS AND VERSE



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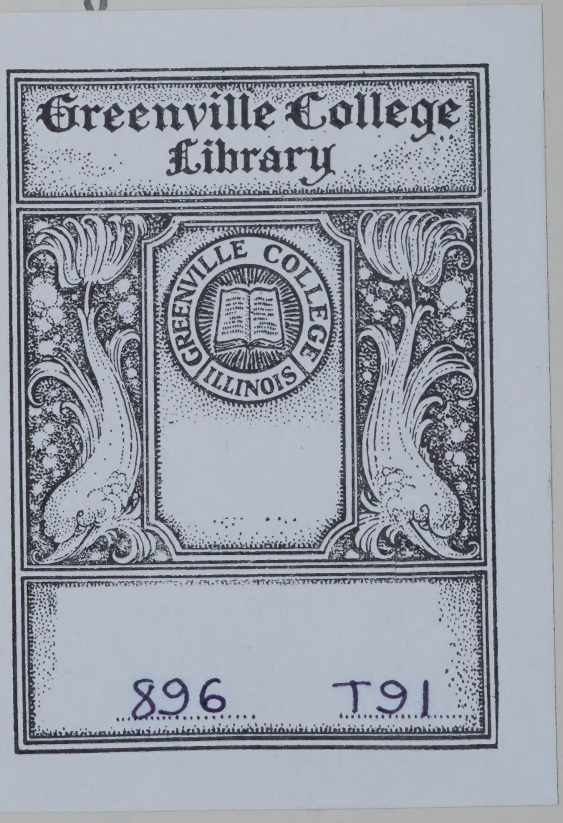
Staff Reveal
South Africa



TWELVE

South African Flowers and Verse

Verses by:

F. C. KOLBE.
HERBERT TUCKER.
"GORDONIA."
BEATRICE M. BROMLEY.
MAUD WYNNE COLE.

JUTA & CO., LTD.

CAPE TOWN :: JOHANNESBURG

Springtide in Pretoria.

Day after day from the relentless blue
On the sere veld the sun's fierce ardours fall.
Eve after sultry eve his crimson ball
'Neath the dust-dimmed horizon dips from view.
And yet—the trees their radiant green renew;
The orchards are enveiled in rose and snow.
Richly the new-leaved roses bud and blow;
And gardens glow with blooms of every hue.
O faith triumphant! that foresees the hour
When rebel clouds shall raid the azure's realm;
And at the thunder's resonant voice of power
Shall all the land in glorious deluge whelm.
Come soon, glad storm! Purge the clogged air with rain
And flash and crash our souls to life again!

—Herbert Tucker.

WOOLLY-BEARDED PROTEA — WOLBAARD SUIKERBOS.
(*Protea barbigera*, Meisn.)

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The Origin of Flowers.

I DREAMT I knew a flowerless land,
  Earth, though her robes were pure and bright,—
Blue sky, green herb, brown soil, white sand,—
  Still lacked her regal gems of light.

Deep in my dream I dreamed again,
  The gate of heaven wide open rolled,
And forth there trooped a joyous train
  Of angel-children rainbow-stoled.

Laughing and dancing, down they came
  Trailing the glories of their birth
Through roseate paths of clouds and flame,
  To keep a holiday on earth.

I felt quite sad our earth had grown
  Nothing for children's hands to cull.
These princelets from before the Throne
  Must find this world a little dull.

MOSSEL BAY KALKOENTJES
(*Tritonia hyalina*, Baker).

No need for fear. The angelic school
Missed naught of things that were not yet.
Besides, they lived heaven's lovely rule,—
To give is sweeter than to get.

They marched in files; they held the fort;
They ransacked every nook and creek;
They played the round of childlike sport
From "Nuts and May" to "Hide and Seek."

When dewy evening fell, the throng
Was massed once more in princely rank.
They marched away with dance and song
And left this weeping world a blank.

Next morn I found (O happy hour!)
Where'er an angel-child had trod,
A heavenly gift, a new-born flower
Peeped at me shyly from the sod.

Sorrels and heaths and daisiettes
Were nodding now where they had played;
Sundews with glistering rosettes
Like them were hiding in the shade.

With angel light kalkoentjes glowed;
With angel music bluebells chimed;
And disas and nerinas showed
The heights where angel feet had climbed.

As Nature, with God's grace endued,
Forgets her clay a little while,
So all this land was rainbow-hued,
And earth gave heaven a sister-smile.

"Now know I whence our radiance gleams,
And this is how the flowers come,"
I said, and woke from both my dreams
To find the lovely land was home.

— F. C. Kolbe.

Fireflies.

On some brooding eve of Spring,
When the winds have rest,
And the last pale blur of day
Dies from out the west —
Fireflies! Fairy guests!
Through my garden stray,
Quickening all its slumbrous dusk
With their rhythmic ray.

Vagrant as the thistledown's
Is the course they take:
With each glint you may not guess
Where the next will break.
Soaring here, sinking there,
Lighting as they pass
Now a rosebud, now a twig,
Now the dewy grass.

WHITE PAPERY HEATH

Erica paperacea, Cutleria and Tolus.

Where the climbing roadway winds
  Through its groves of pine,
Midst the inky undershade
  Everywhere they shine.
As each trailing twinkle fades,
  Others flash to sight,
Meshing all the serried trunks
  In a web of light.

Where the spreading oakboughs build
  O'er the valley stream
Leafy caves of rayless murk,
  Comes their venturous gleam.
Softly stealing, one by one,
  With a raider's art,
In the breast of night they plant
  Many a fiery dart.

Ah! how banal is the thought--
  Tiny, viewless things!—
That should deem you living forms,
  Borne on beating wings.
Rather seems the yearning air
  Passion-charged, until
Throbbing sparks of vital flame
  From its tense heart thrill!

—Herbert Tucker.

The Blue Disa.

No MORTAL hands could e'er contrive
A hood of blue like thine;
No mortal mind could e'er conceive
A perfume so divine.

The wings thou bearest in thy hood,
A god hath given thee,
Called Hermes by the Greeks of old—
By others, Mercury.

Thy mother was the azure sky
Of fairest summer day;
Thy father was the turquoise blue
Which stole her heart away.

Thou art the child the good gods sent—
A child beloved to them.
Thy mother's grace, thy father's charm,
Grow on thy slender stem.

No fairer flower thy patron god
Declared should e'er be seen;
Of all the mountain blooms which blow
He made thee reigning queen.

—" GORDONIA."

YELLOW MARSH AFRIKANDER—AVONDBLOEM
(*Gladiolus tristis*, L.).

Night.

O lovely Night!
God made thee for delight,
And all His fairest gems He set
As star-wreaths, in thy veil to twine,
That, in this canopy of jet
So studded, they might brighter shine,
For earth to see their light.

O lovely Night!
God made thee for delight,
And chose His sweetest flowers to bloom
When flaring day is spent and dead;
They shine in glory through the gloom,
And bless the dusk with incense, shed
From blossoms heavenly-white.

O lovely Night!
God made thee for delight,
Yet some have marred thy fragrant hours
By deeds of darkness and of sin,
And Evil wakes, and Conscience cowers,
And fiends with mortals are akin,
In grieving angels' sight.

O lovely Night!
God made thee for delight,
A guerdon for the work-worn day;
Then lives divided meet again,
With sweet reunion homes are gay,
And Toil lays down the daily chain
Of Life's unending fight.

O lovely Night!
God made thee for delight,
For rest, and peace, and perfect love,
And tender thoughts, and happy sleep;
So blest, we lift our hearts above,
With gratitude serene and deep,
And thank Him for the night!

—Maud Wynne Cole.

Moon Magic.

A FIERCE South-Easter scourged the afternoon;
The mountain's whelming cloud hung dense and low:
The hurtled street-dust stung one like a blow:
And scorching sun-glare made all shade a boon.
Now, purple night enthrones the crystal moon:
The toppling cloud mass gleams like virgin snow:
O'er town and wold the great gusts shouting go,
And clashing pine boughs beat an uncouth tune.
O Queen of Night! how dost thou charm away
All commonplace with thy rich gloom and gleam!
The wind-vexed desolation of the day
Becomes the splendent revel of a dream:
This road — a silvern highway of romance,
Whereon black shades like capering witches dance!

—HERBERT TUCKER.

Helderberg.

Dark Helderberg! those wreaths of mist
On thy tall summit show
That rain from out the north shall come
To make thy brooklets flow.

No South East gales give crowns to thee,
Nor soft refreshing rain;
'Tis in the north thy subjects live—
There lies thy vast domain.

High up thy slopes Nerines grow
And Agapanthus too,
Whilst drooping bells from Caledon
Paint thy fair sides with blue.

Thou art the buttress of the range
And bold and staunch art thou.
A thousand ages hast thou stood,
As grim and strong as now.

White homesteads cluster round thy base
With oak and clinging vine,—
Would that my lot were half as fair,
Dear Helderberg, as thine!

—"Gordonia."

SCARLET OR CRIMSON NERINE.
Nerine sarniensis, Herb.

The Dying Voortrekker.

The doctor says I am dying,
Not another day to live;
I'm not going to fret about it,
We must all take and give;
I've had my share of the life-gift,
The threescore years and the rest—
Tho' the Giver ask for His gift back
We are taught that He knows best.
I'm ready to go now my time's come,
But,—here lads, raise my head!
I'm ready to die, but I can't die
Lying here in the bed.
I've lived my life in the open,
Was born where the sky lay bare,
I must give up my soul where 'twas given
On the wide veld out there.

Inspan once more for me then, sons,
For this will be my last trek;
I should like to see the sun rise
Again over Bronker's Nek,—
I should like to rest at mid-day
Where the thorn's grey shadows lie—

I should like to see the old Cross
Swing out its sign on the sky—
It watched o'er the lonely outspan
Where first I drew my breath;
Who knows but its stars may lighten
The lonelier path to death?

They say I've missed much in this life;
I've never seen the sea!
Nor heard the roar of a city!
Nor felt what the spring can be
In lands where the earth lies hidden
Under a pall of snow—
But there's no spring under heaven
Fairer than *ours*, I know!
When from the dust and ashes
Of her long patient wait
The veld breaks forth rejoicing,
Adorned in fair green state!
When by the eyes that love her
A miracle is seen—
Beauty born out of barrenness!
And *life* where *death* has been!

My father spoke of the "homeland"
Far over that unknown sea,
But *this* is the only homeland
There has ever been for me!

I have known her in peace, in wartime,
In troublous days, in good;
I have been a fighter for her
'Gainst famine, 'gainst drought,
'gainst flood.
I've learnt the silent lessons
She teaches, tho' shadows fall,
Of strength that lies in patience!
Of hope that leads thro' all!

Eh lads! Is the wagon ready?
It's an hour still to the sun.
The dew is grey on the ground yet,
It's clear that summer is done.
I shall not return thro' this doorway,
Bury me where I fall—
Mimosas for my headstone,
The brown grass for a pall.
But whether I sleep at sunrise,
Or rest for *ever* at noon,
Or go when the veld lies under
The white light of the moon—
Listen lads, you who must travel
The same long road that I went;
I have *loved* my life as I found it:
I make the last trek *content!*

—Beatrice M. Bromley.

PRINCE OF WALES HEATH

Erica perspicua Wendl

Graves in the Wilderness.

'Twas a Spring morning: we had driven out
Into the country air. Leaving the cart
I wandered in the wild to gather flowers
Far from the beaten road. I thought no foot
Of man had ever trodden where I trod.
The little monkey-flowers with wide blue eyes
Stared and betrayed themselves. Bright
turkey-bulbs
Cried to be plucked, whilst modest mother-caps
Strove vainly to be hid. The various heaths,
White, purple, red, softened the harmony
Of Nature's visible music in my hand.
While thus I gathered here and there a flower,
I caught a brighter glimpse than any yet,
And forward stepped to rob the favoured spot.
Yet, ere I plucked, I stayed; for there, behold,
With whitened stones to mark the head and feet,
Two little children's graves!

How came they there?
Perchance some labourer on the distant farm
Wept as he laid them there, his little ones;
But afterwards departed, seeking work,
(Alas! 'twas not for him to choose his home),
And left them here neglected — but for me
And for the Angels and the little flowers,
Unwept. For Nature takes a sweet revenge
On those who in this solitary wild
Disturbed her virgin rest, and on these graves
Has showered with loving hand her choicest
blooms.
Ah, sweet, immortal little flowers of God,
Well may your tiny sisters weep for you,
Weep with the glistening dews of eve and morn,
Your sister flowers of earth: they, every Spring,
Rise from their graves and bloom, you year by year
Lie in your narrow tombs and give no sign.
Yes, let them weep: 'tis well for earth to weep,
Poor earth. But you shall have your turn: you too,
Seedlings of Paradise, some day shall bloom,
And rising from your hidden root of earth
Delight the fields of heaven with fragrance sweet
Of blossoms fit for God's own hand to cull.

—F. C. Kolbe.

A Paper Inferno.

(*A Song of the City.*)

When South-Easters vex the street,
Toward the busy day's decline,
Some set place the fates assign
Where the wandering papers meet;
And in straggling circle sweep
Like a flock of frightened sheep.

Strange assorted comrades they!—
Some torn news-sheet's tattered scraps:
Crumpled bags and parcel-wraps,
Mixed with flaunting handbills gay.
Straws and dust, a noisome throng,
With the whirl are borne along.

BLUE AFRIKANDER — BLAUWE AFRIKANER.
Gladiolus recurvus, L.

How they caper, skim and race
Round about the astonished street:
Clinging to some horse's feet—
Leaping in some lady's face!
Mannerless and shameless crew,
Recking naught of what they do.

Comes a gust of fiercer force!
Lifts the leaders high in air;
While their frenzied followers tear
Wildly round their circus-course.
Down the street at headlong pace
New recruits to join them race.

Rash newcomers, have a care!
These whose frolics lure you so
Are but captives—did they know!
Netted in a viewless snare.
Seeming free to go or stay,
None of them can get away!

Surfeited with revelling,
Watch yon soiled and draggled sheet
Creeping slowly down the street,
Like a bird with broken wing.
Some mysterious mandate stern
Stays its flight and bids it turn.

As in Dante's vision dread
Lawless lovers, for their sin,
Round Hell's sombre circle spin,
By a ceaseless tempest sped—
So in sad, perpetual round,
Ruthless gusts these papers hound.

* * * * *

Not eternal is their woe!
For when dawn bestreaks the gloom,
Down the street a shape of doom
With a shouldered sack doth go;
In whose maw each hapless one
Finds a blest oblivion!

—Herbert Tucker.

The Flowers' Tribute.

"And unto God the things that are God's."

God of the hills! they come to pay
Thy tribute — which is due —
In gold and crimson, pearl and rose,
In emerald and blue.

From mountain top and leafy glade,
From precipice and crags,
They gather, in their brilliant coats,
And wave their coloured flags.

No sacrifice upon the cross,
No tears, no wounds for them!
Gaily they march, and marching, weave
Their King a diadem!

Rank upon rank in column deep
The army marches by;
They offer up their hearts to thee
And on Thy Altar die.

—"Gordonia."

FLAMES — VLAMMEN

Antholyza Meriana, L.

The Morning Flower.

(*Aristea cyanea.*)

There is a little fragile flower of Spring
Which, when the morning sunlight drinks the dew,
Lifts to the light a petalled disk of blue
Of such pure colouring,

That scarce the unclouded zenith's sovereign height
In clearest noontide, when a night of rain
Has cleansed the air from every taint and stain,
Shows hue more rich and bright.

A lowly plant, unfeatured and obscure,
With swordlike leaves guarding a stem of green,
Like some mere tuft of grass it grows unseen
Mid the veld's coverture.

But when with morn its folded bloom expands —
Fair as a sky-flake from the azure shed —
It seems a crown, set on the weed's meek head
By consecrating hands;

As if, by very heaven's all-gracious dower,
Earth's humblest had been chosen to uplift,
In awe and wonder, the transcendent gift
Of a celestial flower!

Which gleams upon the furrowed breast of Earth
With such unsullied, soft, cerulean glow
As makes the lordliest flowers that round it grow
Seem things of lesser worth.

Heaven's wakening kiss upon the brow of day!—
It faints in later morn's untempered heat;
And long ere eve it furls its petals sweet
And droops into decay.

And he who may his earlier steps retrace—
Though many a gem the sun-bright meadows wear—
Shall feel that something exquisite and rare
Has vanished from Earth's face.

—Herbert Tucker.

Life as We see it.

A SONG for life as we see it under the stars of the
south!
The flowering months of plenty, the dusty days of
drouth!
The chant of the wind in the krantzes, the pœan of
joy in the rain,
The thrill of the earth, as it wakens from death to life
again!

A song for the morning, lifting wide wings o'er the
dew-drenched land,
Where the desert breezes ruffle from sleep the stirless
sand;
Where the keen, sweet veld-scent rises as incense
beneath the tread,
And silence lies, like a blessing, on the toiling day ahead.

HEIMAN'S CLIFF GLADIOLUS.
Gladiolus cruentus, C. H. Wright.

A song for the drowsy noontide, that broods o'er the quiet street,
Where the white acacia blossoms droop in the golden heat;
A song for night, with the tender, cool touch of her healing hand,
For the starry watch above us, for the dim, still, dreaming land!

There is time here for remembrance, there is space for friendship's root,
And soil for the flower of patience to blossom into fruit;
The ways are wide and stretch onward, and steadily as we tread
Opes ever a path before us, gleams ever a goal ahead!

And they come to us from the nations over the great
sea-ways,
The men whose lives have languished in grim, grey
northern days;
Whose hearts have failed in the struggle with trials they
could not cope,
And our veld-wind sings them courage, and our blue
skies bid them hope!

Then a song for life as we see it under the stars of the
south,
Where the green months of plenty follow the days of
drouth!
A song for the lives grown wider and risen above old
loss,
A song for the hope that ever shines side by side with
the Cross!

—Beatrice M. Bromley.

The Death of Summer.

Summer dies, — with vine-wreathed head,
Clad in robes of gold and red,
Lovely to the last!
Her gown is fringed with tasselled wheat,
Its hem of heather veils her feet, —
What though her reign is past?
Peerless in resplendent prime,
She doffs her crown at harvest-time;
In regal robes of gold and red,
Summer dies, — with vine-wreathed head!

Bravely, Summer bids good-bye
To the world ere she must die,
Laughing to the last!
A queenly shroud, of colours gay,
She dons in which to pass away,—
What though the Autumn blast
Strips it from her, leaf by leaf?
Summer never shews her grief;
To the world, ere she must die,
Bravely, Summer bids good-bye!

—Maud Wynne Cole.

SILVER-LEAVED BOTTLEBRUSH
Mimetes argentea, Ku.

Locusts.

A CLOUD, shimmering, shining—a cloud in the cloudless sky!
Myriads, myriads of them, flitting, flying on high!
Silver sheen on their armour, silent strength in their flight,
Raiders, tireless, ruthless, sweeping along in might!

Creatures, formed by the Maker, Who placing us too below,
Gave us the earth for heritage,—why do ye spoil us so?
We have fought a weary fight 'gainst drought for our poor green things,
And now ye have come to kill them, slayers on gleaming wings!

Wonders lie all around us — wonders of heaven and
earth—
Mysteries of good and evil, mysteries of death and birth;
But ye are a greater mystery, creatures that God has
made
To spoil our hard-won heritage, to steal our children's
bread!

A cloud, shimmering, shining, a cloud in the cloudless
sky!
Myriads, myriads, of them, flitting, flying on high!
Silver sheen on their armour, silent strength in their
flight,
Raiders, tireless, ruthless, pitiless in their might.

—Beatrice M. Bromley.

Two Ways of Love.

In a green hiding place
Beneath a branching thorn,
Beside a laughing brook
A lovely flower was born.

In virgin solitude
From its soft sheath it grew:
The beetle and the ant
Alone the secret knew;

Or, poised above the stream,
The purple dragonfly
Watched how its swelling bud
Unfolded to the sky.

So opened it unseen
Till on a certain day,
Lured by the brook's sweet sound,
A poet chanced that way.

He looked upon the flower
With rapture-lighted face:
Plucked it with eager hands
And bore it from the place.

CAPE ANEMONE — ANEMOON.

Anemone capensis, L.

And as he onward strayed
With devious steps and slow,
His eyes devoured it still
With ardent gaze aglow.

A thousand tender thoughts
His fancy round it wreathed,
And ever as he looked
Low words of praise he breathed.

So from his ecstasy
A wondrous song he wrought,
With fervid rhapsodies
And flashing fancies fraught.

Then when his mood was o'er
He flung the flower away.
It fell upon the path,
For passing feet a prey.

* * *

A little ragged girl—
Some waif without a name—
Barefooted and unkempt,
Along the pathway came,

And by the castaway
She halted, wondering
Whose was the heedless hand
Had dropped so fair a thing.

No soaring strains of praise
Her unskilled lips did try;
Only she loved it so,
She could not let it die!

She raised it from the dust
And kissed its petals sweet:
Then to her squalid home
Sped on with hastened feet.

No vase of price had she,
Naught but an empty tin:
She filled it from the ditch
And placed the flower therein.

Then with a step of pride
She sought her poor abode;
And in an honoured place
Her treasure-trove bestowed.

The water's quickening force
Won back its fainting grace:
It raised its drooping head—
Earth showed no fairer face!

A perfume rare it shed,
Meet for a monarch's bride;
It shone in that dark room
Like a star at eventide!

And oft the little lass,
With love-illumined eyes,
Stole from her drudging tasks
To look upon her prize.

So worshipped, tended, watched
It blossomed for a span,
And blessed with rich reward
Its young Samaritan;

And so by faithful hands
Its fading hours were nursed,
Knowing a nobler love
Than his who found it first.

—Herbert Tucker.

RED HOT POKER — SOLDATEN

Kniphofia aloides, Moench

Our Children.

"We learned from our wistful mothers
To call old England 'home'"

Kipling.

Mother, the Spring is coming!
Down by the vlei-side now
You can see the green on the willow,
The gold on the wattle-bough,
You can watch the cups on the blue-gums
Swinging against the sky,
By and bye they will scatter
Their sweet white tufts from on high.

The aloes are out on the kopjes,
The 'soldiers' yellow and red,
And between the dry thorn bushes
The veld-lily shows its head;
Mother, the Spring is lovely;
See, we found in our roam
Cotton-pods green and silky,
Is it just as lovely *at home?*

Children, the Mother answers,
(And her eyes see across the years)
At home the sweet Spring country
Is green with April's tears—
There are daffodils in the meadows,
There are violets in the lane,
The cuckoo calls thro' the orchards
Midst blossoms that fall like rain.

The blue-bells swing in the breezes,
The cowslip scents the air,
The primrose and the hawthorn
Make every hedgerow fair;
At home the happy children
All thro' the sweet Spring day,
Weave garlands for their crowning,
In ever changing play.

We do not know of the cuckoo—
Our children make reply—
But we see the great asvogels
A-poise in the cloudless sky,
We cannot gather the primrose,
Nor cowslip garlands wear,
But our golden melon-flowers,
Have they blossoms at home so fair?

O children, O happy children,
You will never know what you miss,
A child's pure heart for ever
Makes its own world of bliss!
And you, O wistful Mother,
Tho' afar in fancy you roam
To the sweet spring-land o'er the water,
Yet your *heart* stays here in its *home.*

—Beatrice M. Bromley.

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